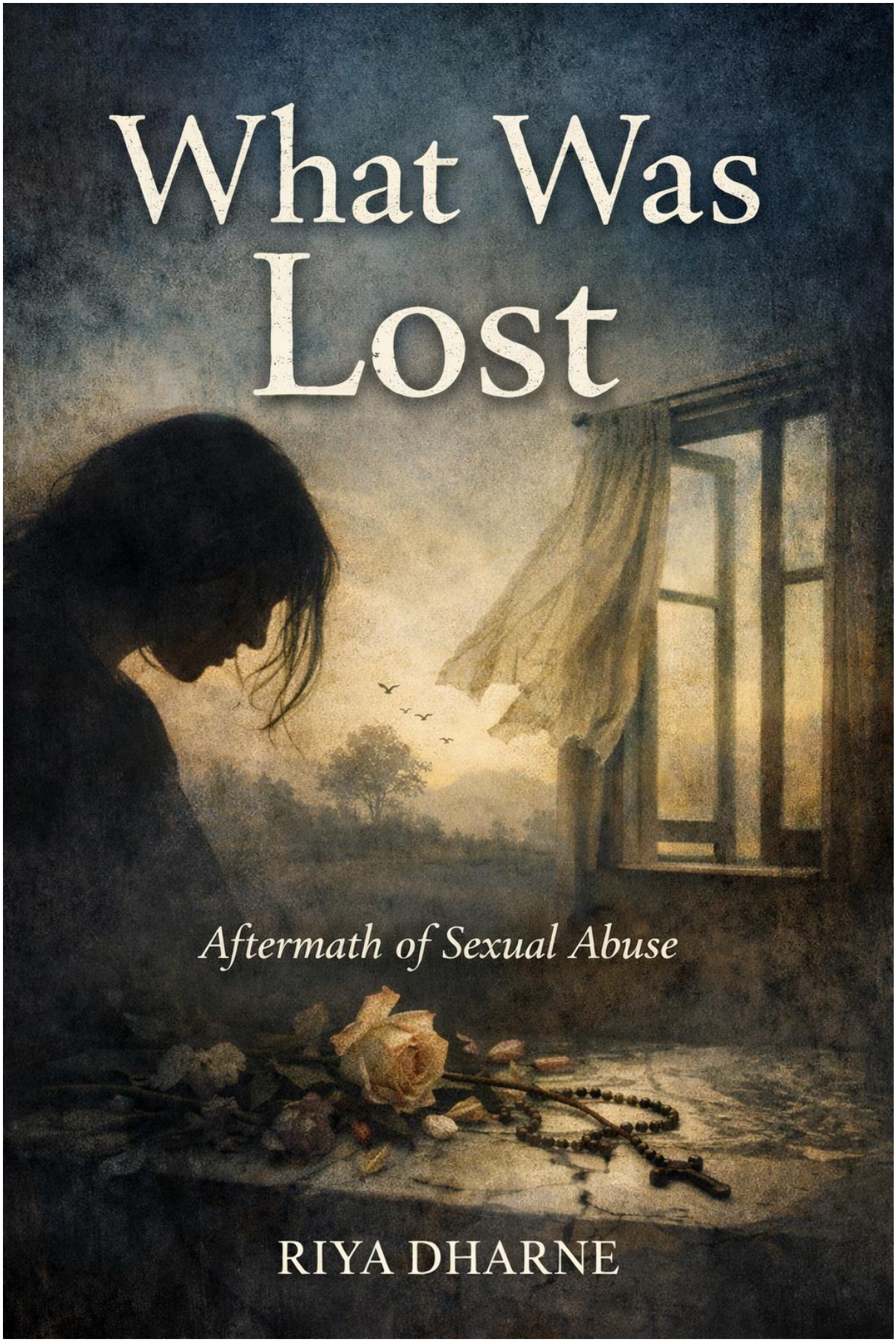
What Was Lost
Aftermath of Sexual Abuse
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Title-

what was lost - Aftermath of sexual abuse

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Content & Care Note

This book contains personal narratives and discussions related to sexual violence, childhood

Abuse, trauma, dissociation, addiction, psychiatric hospitalisation, family violence, and

Suicide loss. While explicit or graphic details have been intentionally avoided, some themes may still be emotionally heavy or activating, particularly for survivors of trauma.

The experiences shared here reflect a wide range of trauma responses. Some reactions, thoughts, or behaviours described may not align with common or socially accepted portrayals of survivors. They are included not to shock, justify, or sensationalise, but to name realities that are often hidden, misunderstood, or met with shame.

This book does not aim to provide clinical guidance, legal advice, or a prescriptive path to healing. It is not a replacement for therapy, crisis support, or professional care. Rather, it is an attempt to offer understanding, language, and recognition—especially for those who have struggled to see their experiences reflected or validated elsewhere.

If at any point you find yourself overwhelmed or in distress, please consider contacting a trusted person, a mental health professional, or a local crisis support service. A list of resources is provided at the end of this book.

At the end of the day, sexual abuse survivors are people who live through lens that nobody without at least a share of it could understand. So here's to looking though a different lens.

Introduction

I'm going to write this book as confused as you because I think that is where most of us will meet.

We had a bright self with interests and a community, a self that woke up not wanting to die.

It's been 5 years since I was sexually abused multiple times, and I can say that sometimes I still don't understand how the betrayal hurt me because wasn't that expected out of men?

Wasn't that exactly what I should have expected when I decided to be in closed, private?

Quarters with a man? Didn't I want it too? Why didn't I run away? Why didn't I say or do anything? Why didn't I report it? Why didn't I stop it? Why didn't I do this and why didn't I do that?

I wish I knew the answers to those questions myself. I want to believe the reality was different, but it isn't, and I know that I'm not alone.

I read several stories, and today I know that the confusion, the questions, and the "why didn't I" s are shared by so many of us. Sexual assault leaves marks we can't always see, and pain that lingers in ways we don't always understand. Some survivors carry the trauma from childhood, others from adolescence or adulthood, and each story is different, but the feelings — Fear, betrayal, shame, and isolation — are often the same.

I have read about people who were attacked while home alone, and how that experience changed their sleep, their sense of safety, and even their families. I have read about those betrayed by people they trusted, by friends, family, and sometimes entire systems that should have protected them. I have read about the struggle to trust, the difficulty of intimacy, and the constant effort to feel safe in your own body. And yet, I have read about resilience — the slow, careful work of reclaiming oneself, of seeking therapy, finding supportive partners, and creating spaces where healing can begin.

What stands out most is how survivors find ways forward, even when the past feels unbearable. Some learn to set boundaries, some to reconnect with their bodies, some to seek connection with those who can hold their pain with care. Healing doesn't erase the trauma, but it does open small doors to hope, to self-respect, and to reclaiming life on your own terms.

Reading these stories reminds me that I am not alone. None of our experiences are mistakes.

None of our struggles makes us weak. The courage to endure, to seek help, and to continue living — even with the questions still unanswered — is proof that survival is not just about enduring harm, but about moving toward light in our own way.

The shared experiences describe how the impact of sexual assault often continues for years or even decades. Many people initially try to ignore or bury the experience, but later develop long-term effects such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, difficulties with trust, and changes in how they relate to others. Some struggle with intimacy, feel unsafe in public spaces, or become highly alert to possible threats.

Memories of the event can be triggered by sounds, smells, or environments, and even small reminders can lead to flashbacks. For some, early childhood trauma shapes their sense of safety, decision-making, and self-worth well into adulthood.

Support systems—friends, partners, therapy—can help, but recovery is rarely linear. Many describe building emotional walls, avoiding certain people or situations, and relying on coping strategies to manage daily life. Even with healing, some effects remain: changes in personality, fear for the safety of loved ones, and persistent self-blame that slowly softens over time.

Despite the weight of these experiences, there is a common theme of resilience. People continue to work on healing, speak about their experiences when they can, and try to support

Others going through similar pain. For most, recovery doesn’t mean erasing the past—it means learning to live with it, one day at a time.

Purpose and scope

As a child, I always wondered what sexual violence meant and why it was taken so seriously. Having had a history of childhood sexual abuse. As a child I had difficulty understanding physical boundaries and why they shouldn't be crossed.

I grew up hearing cases, and I always thought that I would never be one of them. That's what everyone thinks, right? I could be near me or anyone near me. Even the perpetrator cannot be me or anyone near me. We like to keep monstrous things away from ourselves, even if just in our heads.

When it happened to me first as an adult, I took time to even remember the event, forget about knowing it was an assault or admitting it. I had no one to turn to. I could go and tell people only to hear an "I'm sorry" or an "I don't know what to say". Mostly, there was victim-blaming blaming and I did not know how to navigate through this abyss.

There was nobody but my therapist to guide me through this mess, and that was possible since she was a survivor who had done work on herself.

I couldn't understand the seriousness of the event, why it was bad and how it would affect me in the future, and I doubt that the people who stood by watching and blaming the Victims, whilst I dragged myself ahead with everything I had stopped to think about those things.

I doubt they stopped to think about how this would impact my life drastically in the years to come.

I am someone who works on my healing by educating myself through other people's experiences, but there was nothing much that I could find. I was raped, I understood coercion and fight, flight,

Freeze response, all the scientific bullshit, but now what? How do I build what was lost when I did not even know what was lost?

This is what this book aims to cover- what was lost. I am no healer as of now. I know I have healed a lot, but I am certainly not in a position to speak about healing. There are too many books about that.

I want to talk about what nobody talks about. The shame we carry in silence, the isolation, the pain and tears that are pushed underneath the rug. So here we are with “what was lost”.

Chapter 1- How it all began

It was mid-afternoon, the kind of soft, golden hour that makes everything feel gentler than it really is. He had brought ice cream—something so simple, yet something no boy had done for nineteen-year-old me before. I remember feeling lightly flattered, lightly special, lightly chosen. We sat in a quiet open space overlooking a strip of forest, the breeze moving through the leaves in slow waves. It felt like a temporary escape, a pocket of calm carved out from the chaos of the pandemic. Everyone was unravelling in their own way that year, and maybe that is why I clung so tightly to anything that looked like tenderness.

It was only the second time we had met. We sat close, and his head eventually found my lap.

There was a softness to the moment—two people holding onto each other not because they knew each other well, but because they were both afraid of the world falling apart outside.

And then, slowly but unmistakably, the atmosphere changed.

His intentions shifted.

Mine didn’t.

I tried to communicate that I wasn’t ready, that what he wanted was unfamiliar territory for me. I was clear, but clarity doesn’t matter when someone refuses to listen. What followed was a series of moments I didn’t understand at the time—coercion disguised as affection, pressure disguised as closeness. I froze. Completely. My body shut down, my voice disappeared, and the part of my mind that normally screamed warnings went silent. It was as if I had dissolved inside myself, watching things happen from some faraway corner.

He left on his bike afterwards, and I stood there with a broken sense-making system, unable to name what had happened. All I knew was that something inside me was off-axis. I walked to a small shop and bought chocolate milk, grasping at anything ordinary to pull me back into reality. I sat on the steps outside, watching scooters and pedestrians pass as if I wasn’t really there. My favourite street dog wandered up to me—he always did—but this time the timing felt cosmic. He rested near my feet, as if he could sense a disturbance I couldn’t articulate.

I knew something was wrong, but I didn't know the word for it.

I knew I needed to leave him, but I didn't know why I couldn't form the thought clearly.

I kept asking myself, "Why didn't I scream? Why didn't I run? What is wrong with me?"

But I didn't know then that freezing is a survival instinct, not a failure.

I threw the juice box into a bin and started the walk home. The same breeze that felt comforting earlier now felt strange—like it was passing through a hollowed-out version of me. It felt like my body belonged to the wind now, not to me.

On the way home, I thought briefly about telling my mother. But the fear of how she would react, the fear of being blamed for meeting a boy at all, closed my throat. So I swallowed my tears and my confusion and continued life as if nothing had happened. I blocked him. I pushed the whole thing out of my mind the way a child slams a door shut on a room they're terrified to enter.

Online college began soon after—my bachelor's degree, something I had genuinely looked forward to. But I couldn't focus. I slept constantly. My room became a quiet disaster: rotting banana peels, empty wafer packets, clothes piled in corners. I would join classes and stare blankly at the screen or fall asleep mid-lecture. The world felt dimmed, muffled, and distant.

When the numbness became unbearable, I slipped back into old self-destructive habits, old wounds reopening as if they had been waiting for their cue.

I decided to return to therapy.

During my first few sessions, all I talked about was home—my mother, our arguments, the tension that had always lived between us. It was as if my brain had protective amnesia around the incident. Weeks passed. Then one day, out of nowhere, the question spilled out:

"Do you think what happened to me… was my fault?"

My therapist paused. She looked confused—concerned, even. As I explained what I remembered, piece by piece, she listened carefully. When I finished, she said gently but firmly that what I described was not my fault—and that what happened to me was an assault.

I rejected it at first.

Then doubted myself.

Then doubted her.

Then doubted reality.

It took months for her words to settle.

Years for me to believe them.

The self-harm escalated. The emotional pain turned physical because I didn't know how else to process it. Eventually, I was put on psychiatric medication. I was unravelling in slow

motion, and it would be a long time before I understood that the unravelling was not weakness—it was the natural consequence of unacknowledged trauma finally surfacing.

But at nineteen, all I knew was that something inside me had broken open, and I couldn't yet name the wound.

CHAPTER 2- all the complexities

I skipped in-person classes and risked my attendance just so I could receive DBT sessions the way they were meant to be—face to face, grounded in a room where someone could actually see me, not just hear me through a screen. Something about being physically present felt like the only way to make the world feel real again, or at least less unbearable.

Traveling for therapy became its own ritual of survival. I stepped into the city of Mumbai with a kind of shaky determination, carrying both exhaustion and hope in my backpack. The hostel I stayed in was old, worn down in places, but somehow still humming with life.

Students, working women, strangers who became familiar faces—all of them drifting in and out of the corridors. I attended online classes from that tiny shared room and fell asleep mid lecture more often than I'd like to admit. When my friends returned from their day, we gathered around plates of dal and rice we could never finish, talking about nothing and everything.

On days when the heaviness got too loud, I took the train. I didn't have a destination—only motion. From CSMT to Kalyan and back again, the compartments rocking me into a temporary peace. I made friends along those train rides, laughed at things that weren't truly funny, and let the rhythmic clatter of the tracks drown out the ache I couldn't name. Mumbai became a pause in a life that felt like it was spiralling too fast. But a pause is still not a full stop, and eventually it was time to go home and start university properly.

But even as university began, the pain didn't end. It shifted, grew quieter sometimes, and then came back with a force I didn't know how to contain. The self-harm wouldn't stop. I overdosed once, then again. The guilt, shame, and emotional numbness fed into each other like a loop I couldn't find my way out of.

At some point—before Mumbai, after Mumbai, sometimes in between—I admitted myself into rehab. Not once, not twice, but three separate times. Each stay was voluntary in name, but emotionally, it felt like the only way to keep myself alive. I also ended up hospitalized the same number of times. And every single time, the same thought echoed through me like a cruel mantra:

"Why am I the one being locked up when I'm not the one who caused the harm?"

Rehab was not the transformative, peaceful environment people imagine when they hear the word “treatment.” No one glamorizes rehab, but even the unglamorous descriptions fall short.

It was overcrowded, understaffed, and at times stripped of dignity. The insect-ridden pathways, the iron gates, the netted windows—they all made me feel like I was being punished, not healed.

I paced those corridors for hours, listening to the relentless ticking of the clock. Sometimes

I’d stop walking only to realize my mind had drifted miles away, trying to escape in any direction possible. Despite everything, I made friends. Psychology students have a strange way of trying to study their surroundings even when those surroundings are their own pain. I tried to treat it as a learning experience, as if intellectualizing it would make it hurt less.

But nothing could make up for the lack of privacy. Showers where the boundaries between people collapsed. A woman relieving herself while another brushed her teeth nearby.

Someone else reapplying lipstick in a place where mirrors felt like a threat. The smell, the chaos, the noise—it all made recovery feel distant.

What frustrated me the most was the routine: waking up at 6 a.m. for breakfast and meds only to spend the rest of the day waiting for… nothing, really. The emptiness of those days swallowed time whole. No phone, no outside contact, no sense of autonomy. Just the expectation that being cut off from the world would somehow make my internal world easier to handle.

My therapist once told me that the day I began to feel anger, I should congratulate myself.

Anger meant I was waking up to the truth. But in rehab, the anger didn’t feel like progress—

It felt like failure. Like a reminder that I wasn’t living the life my peers were living. They were studying in hostels, making memories, preparing for exams—while I was being force fed through a tube so my organs wouldn’t give up.

Time stretched strangely there. Days ticked by, nights ticked by, and the urges to self-harm faded slowly, almost the way an addiction loses its grip when you’re isolated from its triggers. I didn’t have access to the tools I used to hurt myself, but the pain didn’t disappear just because the means weren’t there.

Sometimes, as a small mercy, we were allowed to walk on the grass for an hour—unless it rained. There was a horse on the property too, beautiful and silent, but he wasn’t allowed on the grass. Somehow that image always stayed with me: a creature meant to run, confined to cement. It mirrored the way I felt—alive, but trapped.

Lectures, group sessions, art therapy—they existed, but none of them felt like a cure. I kept waiting for something to make the ache stop, but it never really did. Not fully.

I survived bachelors, though barely. I envied the students who studied uninterrupted, who took exams without IV lines or feeding tubes or psychiatric evaluations. I envied the

normalcy of their lives. After stumbling through the degree the first time, I took a break year, thinking a fresh start would help.

I didn’t yet realize that the story wasn’t done with me. That healing wasn’t linear. That recovery wasn’t a single chapter but a recurring theme.

And that everything I had endured was only one part of a much larger, still-unfolding journey.

Chapter 3

The science of re-enactment

Before anything else, it helps to understand that trauma does not settle neatly into memory. When something overwhelming happens, the mind is not focused on understanding or recording events—it is focused on surviving. Meaning, sequence, and reflection often come later, if at all.

Because of this, trauma is not stored as a single story with a beginning and an end. It lingers in pieces: in the body, in emotional reactions, in sudden urges, and in expectations about how relationships work. Something remains unfinished.

Re-enactment is one way this unfinished experience continues to surface. It is not a conscious decision to repeat harm. It is the nervous system returning to what it already knows, drawn toward familiar states in an attempt to regain control, reduce uncertainty, or create an ending that was never possible at the time. What repeats is not the event itself, but the *state* it left behind—the feeling of danger, powerlessness, intensity, or loss of choice.

Ways Re-enactment Can Appear

Somatic (Body-Based) Re-enactment

Sometimes the body reacts before the mind understands what is happening. Tension, freezing, collapse, pain, or automatic submission can arise in situations that resemble past threat. Even when a person knows they are safe, the body may respond as though danger is present.

Emotional Re-enactment

Certain emotional states—fear, shame, guilt, helplessness—can return again and again. A person may expect harm, dismiss their own pain, or turn blame inward. These emotions recreate the imbalance of power internally, even when no one else is actively causing harm.

Relational Re-enactment

Trauma can shape how people relate to others. Survivors may find themselves drawn to relationships that echo earlier experiences of control, neglect, or boundary violations. What is familiar can feel safer than what is unknown, even when it is painful.

Sexual Re-enactment

Sexual thoughts, fantasies, or behaviours may repeat elements of the original trauma, such as loss of control or role reversal. This can be deeply confusing. Arousal during re-enactment does not mean the harm was wanted. It reflects how the nervous system learned to respond under conditions where choice was not available. Shame often follows, largely because this response is misunderstood.

Behavioural Re-enactment

Some people recreate the intensity of trauma through risk-taking, substance use, self-harm, or repeated exposure to unsafe situations. These behaviours are often attempts to regulate overwhelming emotions or to feel something when numbness takes over.

Cognitive Re-enactment

The beliefs formed during trauma can continue long after the event has ended. Thoughts such as *this is my fault*, *harm is inevitable*, or *I have no agency* may replay internally. In this way, the mind keeps returning to meanings that were imposed during the trauma.

Re-enactment is not a desire to suffer, nor a failure to heal. It is a survival response shaped by an experience that did not get the chance to fully end.

Chapter 4- losing myself again

I began my master's degree with genuine enthusiasm. After everything I had survived, getting here felt like proof that I was still capable of moving forward. But living with borderline personality disorder meant that coping—both at home and in the hostel—was never simple. Some days I managed well enough, other days I barely held myself together. I tried to make the best of it anyway, telling myself that persistence counted for something, even when stability felt out of reach.

I felt deeply isolated from my family. Years of arguments, misunderstandings, and unresolved hurt had created a distance that felt permanent, like something irreversibly broken. In many ways, I felt as though I had already lost them. Still, I kept visiting on weekends, driven by habit, obligation, or maybe a small, stubborn hope that things could someday feel different.

One such weekend, I decided to meet a friend—someone I had known for about three years.

We had met on a dating website and only saw each other occasionally over time. It felt familiar enough, safe enough, or at least that's what I told myself. I won't go into details here, but he raped me. In ways I had never imagined someone could.

At the time, I was using a walker. There wasn't much I could physically do to get away, and my fear wasn't just emotional—it was medical. I was terrified of being injured in a way that could permanently worsen my condition. I remember calculating risks even as everything inside me shut down. And yet, when it was time to go home, I did what I had done before. I wiped my tears. I straightened myself up. I walked home on my walker as if nothing had happened.

The next day, I left for college.

I was completely dissociated. My mind felt fragmented, like it had shattered into pieces that no longer belonged to the same picture. I was living in a world made of parts that wouldn't fit together, parts I couldn't even recognize anymore. I attended classes physically, but mentally

I was somewhere else entirely—floating, disconnected, untethered.

When I walked, it felt as though I wasn't touching the ground at all. As though I was suspended in air, already halfway gone. I remember thinking, this is it. This is the end. I had spent years fighting to stay alive, fighting through trauma after trauma, and suddenly I

didn’t have the energy anymore. I didn’t feel worthy of the fight. Something inside me had quietly given up.

I cried in the arms of people I barely knew—people who weren’t even my friends yet. I didn’t care who saw me unravel. My self-harm escalated, becoming more frequent, more desperate.

And then I crossed a line I had never crossed before. I entered the realm of substance abuse.

From the very beginning, I drank like an alcoholic. Not gradually, not socially—immediately and intensely. Alcohol dulled the edges for a while. When I was drinking, thinking felt bearable. But the moment the last drop was gone, everything came rushing back. The pain, the memories, the shame, the suicidal thoughts—they returned louder than before.

I would cry, hurt myself, and spiral again. The only reason I didn’t attempt suicide was because I knew how that story ended. I had been there before. I knew I would either wake up in a psychiatric ward, be sent to rehab, or be forced back home—each option feeling like its own kind of punishment. So instead, I kept drinking.

When the money started running out, I turned to cheaper substances. Things that kept me going—or at least kept me numb. I told myself I was surviving, but in reality, I was slowly disappearing. I missed classes. I missed assignments. I missed exams. I damaged friendships

I cared about, said things I couldn’t take back, and isolated myself further with every passing week.

Life continued, but it did so in a series of disasters—many of them consequences of my substance use. Eventually, I was sent to rehab again. This time, it wasn’t my choice. The experience was hellish, and even that word feels insufficient. It stripped me of control, dignity, and autonomy. Still, in a way I didn’t understand at the time, it was necessary.

It has been almost three months since I was discharged.

Only now do I truly understand why I need to write. Why I need to put words to what was taken, to what was lost—not just from me, but from people like us. People whose lives fracture quietly, whose suffering is easy to dismiss, whose survival is mistaken for strength.

This was my story.

Chapter 5- My story with CSA (childhood sexual abuse)

Sometimes I still don't like to accept that it happened. I haven't confronted myself like I'm going to confront myself in this chapter.

That person was not much older than me but knew much more than me. They made me do things to them, and they did things to me which felt wrong, but it was just a "game, a thrilling one at that.

I recalled these incidents quite late to my mother, who then itself understood what it meant, unlike me, who would just fill up with so much shame that I would curl up. The shame that still eats me up.

I never understood sexuality the way it was supposed to be understood, and kept walking into situations that weren't safe for me. It was the same story repeated, and in those moments, I always got a feeling of déjà vu; I just didn't realize that- yes, I'd been there before. Yet I continued because my brain wanted me to see the one thing that I had been hiding from forever. The one thing that was also hiding behind the self-harm scars, the bulimia and the endless sinking pain in the chest.

There is grief, a lot of it. I want to process it, but away from everyone so that no one has a chance to make me feel ashamed about it again. It is chilling how a little game and a few incidents can shape your life the way those incidents shaped my life.

One of my friends who passed away around what is my age now also survived CSA. They had a plethora of mental and physical health issues that were intolerable. I wish they hadn't been through this. I wish that they had made it, but they didn't.

This chapter is very loose as I am just thinking out loud.

It made me hate myself, you know. How could I do something like that? It took me ages to accept that I wasn't the doer of something that despicable, but I was the survivor of the same.

Every time I ended up in rehab, I heard stories and watched the after effects of the same flood in front of my own eyes in the form of symptoms. They were much more than symptoms; they were grief and anger and shame and whatnot. They were suppressed, they were silenced, and they were shamed.

If I weren't carrying the shame and didn't feel like I had to carry the secrecy, maybe I would have carved one less self—harm cut or made myself throw up a little less. Maybe I would be much more functional, but at the end of the day, I wouldn't have been writing this book.

So, here's to other survivors.

Chapter 6 – aftermath of SA (sexual assault) summarised

Across different lives, different ages, and different places, the same pattern appears. The details change, but the core remains. Harm. Silence. Confusion. Survival. What stays with survivors is often not the moment itself, but what follows. The aftermath. The long shadow it casts. The quiet injuries. The slow and uneven attempt to feel like a person again.

Many survivors describe trying to forget what happened. They pushed it away and told themselves it wasn't real, or that it didn't matter. When the person responsible was someone they knew, the damage ran deeper. Familiarity blurred the lines. It made the betrayal harder to name and even harder to speak about. Some did report what happened. Instead of relief, they met systems that questioned them, minimised the harm, or erased it entirely. Being told that their age, their relationship to the person, or the circumstances meant it "didn't count" became a second trauma.

Even with supportive friends, family, or therapists, the aftermath felt deeply isolating. Panic arrived without warning. Crying spells came out of nowhere. Fear lived in the body. A hand on the wrist. Someone standing too close. A voice, a build, a presence behind them. The body remembered what the mind tried to bury. For some, these reactions faded with time. For others, they never fully left. They just became quieter. A crowded room. A stranger in line. A memory that refuses to stay hidden.

Time did not automatically restore trust. For some, it had been two years. For others, twenty.

Still, closeness felt dangerous. Even safe people felt unsafe. Some never learned how to form healthy attachments. Others wondered whether their distance from people was a result of the trauma or something they slowly became afterward. Dissociation appears again and again.

Lost memories. Emotional numbness. The feeling of being detached from one's own life. For some, the memories returned years later, triggered by unrelated events. Accidents. Illness.

Hospitalization. What was once buried resurfaced, forcing them to understand what their mind had hidden to survive.

The emotional fallout did not move in one direction. Some became fearful and withdrawn, unable to leave their homes or sleep in their own rooms. Others moved toward risk.

Sensation. Intimacy. Substances. Anything that could fill the emptiness or quiet the noise.

Hyper sexuality, self-harm, alcohol, and drugs were not about pleasure. They were about escape. About control. About finding relief from a mind that felt impossible to live inside.

Alongside the damage, there are moments of resilience. Some survivors speak about therapy.

Others about community, culture, or spirituality. Many describe reclaiming their bodies in small, deliberate ways. Sleeping alone again. Rearranging rooms. Changing their appearance.

Learning to touch their own skin without fear. These acts were not superficial. They were ways of taking something back.

Healing is rarely described as forgetting. It is described as learning how to carry the memory without being crushed by it. The trauma does not disappear. It changes shape. It softens at the edges. It becomes something that can be lived with, rather than something that takes over everything. The fear remains. So does the strength.

A recurring theme is the return of power. Survivors who were once silenced begin to speak.

They challenge harmful myths. They refuse victim-blaming. Some speak from anger. Others from a quiet resolve. Not to be defined by what happened. Not to let it stay unchallenged.

Beneath all these stories is the same contradiction. The world feels more dangerous—and safer—at the same time. Survivors describe being afraid of everyone and no one. Wounded, but braver than before. Changed, but not erased. Hurt, but still here.

What remains is a shared truth. Healing is not linear. It is not complete. It does not erase the past. It is an ongoing negotiation with the self. A process of rebuilding identity, relearning trust, and choosing—again and again—to stay alive. These stories do not form a single narrative. They form a shared understanding: that people bend in ways they never imagined they could, and somehow still find ways to rise, rebuild, and reclaim dignity after what should have broken them.

Chapter 7 – The science of it sexual assault

Before continuing, it may help to pause and name the forces that shape the pages ahead.

Trauma has its own logic, its own rules, and its own vocabulary. Without this language, survivors are often misunderstood—by others, and by themselves. This chapter exists to offer that language, not as a diagnostic manual, but as a map.

Trauma Psychology: When Survival Takes the Wheel

Trauma is not defined by the event itself, but by how the nervous system experiences and stores it. When a person is overwhelmed beyond their capacity to cope, the brain shifts from everyday functioning into survival mode. Rational thought gives way to instinct. The goal becomes simple: stay alive.

In this state, reactions that later feel confusing—numbness, compliance, silence, freezing—are not choices. They are automatic responses driven by the nervous system. Trauma psychology asks us to stop judging these responses and start understanding them.

PTSD and Complex PTSD

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can develop after a single traumatic event, while

Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) often arises from prolonged or repeated trauma, especially when escape is limited or the harm occurs in relationships that were meant to be safe.

Both can involve intrusive memories, emotional dysregulation, hypervigilance, avoidance, and a distorted sense of self. C-PTSD often includes additional layers: chronic shame, difficulty trusting others, unstable self-worth, and a persistent feeling of being unsafe—even when no immediate threat exists.

These conditions are not weaknesses. They are evidence of a nervous system that adapted to danger.

Dissociation: Leaving Without Moving

Dissociation is one of the mind's most powerful protective tools. When the body cannot escape, the mind may distance itself from the experience. This can look like emotional numbness, memory gaps, depersonalization, or a sense of watching life from the outside.

For some, dissociation occurs during the trauma itself. For others, it surfaces later—sometimes years later—when the body finally feels safe enough to release what was stored.

Dissociation allows survival, but it can also delay understanding.

Freeze and Fawn Responses

Most people are familiar with fight or flight. Trauma introduces two additional survival responses:

 Freeze: the body becomes immobile, voice disappears, muscles lock. This is often mistaken for passivity or consent, but it is neither.

 Fawn: the person attempts to appease, placate, or comply in order to reduce harm.

This response prioritises safety over boundaries.

Both responses are deeply misunderstood, especially in the context of sexual violence.

Neither implies agreement. Both reflect the nervous system choosing the option most likely to minimise danger.

Trauma Bonding-

Trauma bonding occurs when harm and connection become intertwined. This can happen when the perpetrator is someone familiar, trusted, or emotionally significant. The nervous system struggles to reconcile affection with violation, often leading to confusion, attachment, or self-blame.

Trauma bonds are not signs of weakness or desire. They are the result of survival instincts colliding with human attachment needs.

Memory Fragmentation -

Traumatic memories are often stored differently from ordinary ones. Instead of forming a clear, chronological narrative, they may exist as fragments—sensations, images, emotions, or bodily reactions without context.

This fragmentation can make survivors doubt their own experiences. Remembering “too

Little” or “too late” does not make the trauma less real. It reflects how the brain protected itself when full awareness was too much to bear.

Avoidance and Hyper arousal -

After trauma, the nervous system may swing between two states:

 Avoidance: withdrawing from reminders, emotions, people, or places associated with the trauma.

 Hyper arousal: constant alertness, startle responses, anxiety, difficulty resting, or feeling on edge.

These states are not contradictions. They are two sides of the same attempt to prevent re harm.

Triggers and Flashbacks-

Triggers are cues—internal or external—that remind the nervous system of past danger. A smell, a touch, a tone of voice, a situation. Flashbacks are not memories in the usual sense; they are re-experiences. The body reacts as if the trauma is happening now, even when the person knows it isn't.

This disconnect between logic and bodily response can be deeply distressing, and it often leads to self-judgment. Understanding this gap is essential for compassion.

Sexual Violence Psychology -

Rape Trauma Syndrome -

Rape Trauma Syndrome describes the acute and long-term psychological responses to sexual violence. These can include shock, denial, fear, guilt, anger, emotional numbing, changes in sleep and appetite, and disruptions in identity and relationships.

There is no correct way to respond. Survivors may appear functional while internally unravelling, or visibly struggle while feeling emotionally detached.

Shame and Guilt Cycles -

Shame and guilt often attach themselves to trauma, even when the survivor bears no responsibility. The mind searches for control: If it were my fault, maybe I could have prevented it. This illusion of control can feel safer than accepting powerlessness—but it comes at a cost.

Breaking these cycles requires replacing blame with understanding.

Learned Helplessness -

Repeated experiences of having boundaries ignored can lead to learned helplessness—the belief that resistance is futile. This is not passivity; it is adaptation. The nervous system learns that survival may depend on endurance rather than resistance.

Betrayal Trauma -

When harm comes from someone trusted, the injury cuts deeper. Betrayal trauma disrupts a person's ability to rely on others, on institutions, and sometimes on their own judgment. It can fracture one's sense of reality and safety in relationships.

Impact on Attachment -

Trauma can reshape how people attach to others—leading to avoidance, anxiety, fear of intimacy, or difficulty trusting. These patterns are not personality flaws. They are protective strategies developed in response to violation.

Why This Matters -

The chapters that follow may seem contradictory at times—strength beside collapse, clarity beside confusion, anger beside forgiveness. Trauma is not linear, and neither is healing.

This framework exists so the reader can understand what unfolds without simplifying it, judging it, or expecting resolution where there may instead be coexistence.

What follows is not a story of weakness.

It is a story of survival written in the language of the nervous system.

Chapter 8-

SURVIVOR 1- as written by them

Hello,

I am a survivor of sexual violence, and I have chosen to share my story for one reason above all others: to help other survivors recognise the legitimacy of their experiences, to help them understand themselves, and—most importantly—to break the silence around traumatic responses that are still rarely discussed or widely understood.

For a long time, I searched desperately for testimonies like this one. I wanted reassurance. I wanted to understand my own reactions. I wanted proof that I was not alone in experiencing behaviours that are often labelled “deviant,” shameful, or incompatible with the narrow image society holds of what a victim is supposed to look like. Because of this silence, it took me far longer than it should have to accept that I was a legitimate victim—and to stop minimising what had happened to me.

I will not describe my assault in detail. Context matters, but the specifics do not. No matter the form sexual violence takes, survivors can develop the same post-traumatic symptoms.

What happened to me occurred when I was twelve years old, during what was supposed to be a harmless sleepover. A boy my age crossed boundaries while I was vulnerable. Confused and overwhelmed, I pretended to be asleep. Eventually, I found a way to remove myself from the situation. After that night, I did not speak about it—or even consciously think about it—for years. And yet, the trauma expressed itself in other ways.

One thing I want to make very clear is this: my assault did not match what society often portrays as “violent” rape. There was no extreme force, and there was no penetration. Legally and culturally, this distinction matters far too much. The current definition of rape is still centred on penetration, which quietly reinforces the idea that harm is only valid when it fits a male-centred model of sexuality. This framework minimises the suffering of countless survivors.

When an assault does not fit that mould, the pain is often dismissed—by others, and by the survivor themselves. I spent years asking myself the same question on repeat: Why are you making such a big deal out of something so small? Compared to other stories I read or saw portrayed in the media, my experience felt insignificant. I feared that if I ever spoke up, no one would take me seriously. Worse, I felt deeply ashamed of how much it affected me.

I carried an overwhelming sense of guilt—not for what happened, but for what didn't happen.

I believed that if the violence had been more obvious, more brutal, I would feel more entitled to call myself a victim. Even today, I sometimes feel as though I am exaggerating, inventing suffering as an excuse for being unwell or for wanting compassion.

After the assault, I became deeply uncomfortable with any form of romantic or sexual tension. Dating felt impossible. I feared expectations I did not know how to meet. For a long time, I believed I might be asexual. At the same time, my mind was flooded with intrusive thoughts—imagined scenarios that reflected society's most extreme depictions of sexual violence. These thoughts were unwanted and deeply distressing, yet they returned again and again. I hated myself for them, without understanding that they were a trauma response.

I also engaged in behaviours that placed me at risk, as if I were unconsciously trying to validate my pain by recreating danger. Looking back, I see how profoundly confused and unprotected I was.

Five years later, I entered my first serious relationship. It quickly became unhealthy. I did not understand consent—my own or anyone else's. Sex became mechanical, compulsive, disconnected from intimacy. My self-worth deteriorated. Although this partner was the first person I spoke to about my assault, I altered my story, exaggerating details because I felt my truth was not "enough." I was ashamed of my own reality.

Lies became a survival strategy. Because my trauma responses did not match what people expected, I believed I had to reshape my story to be believed. Over time, I lost track of what was real. My memory fragmented. My brain rejected my own experience because it did not fit the narrative of "acceptable" trauma.

At times, I felt ashamed of thoughts I didn't want to have—like comparing my pain to others', or feeling a quiet envy of stories that seemed more "valid." These thoughts terrified me. I feared they made me a bad person, even though I continued to support others with genuine care.

Today, I am doing better. I have found people who listen without judgment. With my current partner, I am learning—slowly and awkwardly—how to express consent, even in the smallest ways. Something as simple as saying "I don't like this" can still take enormous effort. There are moments when intrusive thoughts return, or when I cry without fully knowing why. But those moments are becoming rarer. There are long stretches now when I feel present, grounded, and alive.

Healing is slow. Sometimes I'm afraid of it. I wonder who I am without this pain, and that fear alone can feel destabilising. But I am learning that I am more than what was done to me.

This chapter is for anyone who has experienced sexual violence—no matter the form it took.

You do not have to feel guilty. You do not have to doubt yourself. You do not have to be ashamed. There are as many trauma responses as there are survivors. What matters is your experience, your pain, your truth.

There are no “good” victims or “bad” victims.

There are only victims—and survivors. I hope this helped you feel seen, understood, or a little less alone.

Chapter 9- Survivor 2- as written by them

Some lives are shaped by a single rupture.

Others are shaped by years of being taught—quietly, repeatedly—that safety is temporary and silence is required.

This story begins in childhood, at an age when understanding is incomplete but the body already knows when something is wrong. Over the course of many months, boundaries were violated by someone older. When the harm was finally discovered, what followed was not protection or care, but denial. The adults who were meant to help chose shame over support.

Instead of healing, the experience was buried. Instead of safety, there was silence.

That silence did not erase what happened. It redirected it.

Without language or guidance, the pain emerged in ways no one recognized as trauma.

Behaviour became the message. Anger, defiance, and distress surfaced early, only to be met with punishment instead of understanding. Violence was answered with more violence.

Confusion was answered with discipline. The child learned, again and again, that something was wrong—but not what, and not why.

There was no extended family to soften the impact, no stable friendships to anchor identity.

Life was transient. Constant moving meant constant goodbyes, interrupted schooling, and no chance to settle long enough to feel known. Learning became harder. Concentration slipped.

Diagnoses came later—attention difficulties, neurodevelopmental differences—but none of them explained the full picture. The system saw symptoms, not context.

By the time adulthood arrived, the foundation was already fractured.

Home was never truly safe. Conflict escalated into fear. Boundaries were crossed even then.

One incident, witnessed by loved ones, marked a final rupture—proof that harm was not confined to the past. There was no apology. No reckoning. Only loss.

Illness came next. Then death. And then more death.

Within a few short years, both parents were gone—one to disease, the other to despair.

Finding the aftermath of that choice is a trauma few are prepared for. Grief arrived tangled with unanswered questions, unfinished conversations, and the unbearable weight of responsibility left behind. Even joy—like expecting a child—was folded into tragedy.

Trauma does not disappear when life continues. It waits.

Years later, pain found a quieter outlet. What began as relief became dependence. Numbness felt like peace. Control felt like survival. But addiction does not negotiate—it takes. Slowly at first, then all at once. Work, stability, trust, dignity—each was traded for the promise of not feeling.

Eventually, the truth surfaced. Interventions followed. Not all of them were gentle. What came next was a cascade: hospitalization, separation, legal barriers, and homelessness. Help came with conditions. Recovery came with loss.

Rehab offered structure but no reunion. Sobriety did not immediately restore what had been broken. Returning home meant proximity without belonging. Children grew distant. One withdrew entirely. Another expressed pain in ways that were impossible to ignore and impossible to fix.

Still, there was effort. New work. New beginnings attempted without a safety net. Then another blow: employment ended the same day legal finality arrived. Financial obligations erased what little remained. A hotel room became the last shelter.

And then the body intervened.

A stroke halted everything. Recovery required distance—from home, from children, from the life that once existed. Physical healing began far away from emotional repair. The world moved on while the body learned to move again.

What remains now is not a single trauma, but layers of them—stacked across a lifetime. Early harm. Neglect. Violence. Loss. Addiction. Estrangement. Illness. Displacement. Each one unresolved before the next arrived.

This is what Complex PTSD looks like when it spans decades.

Not a single wound, but a nervous system shaped by repeated abandonment.

And yet—this story is being told.

Not because everything is resolved. Not because healing is complete. But because survival itself deserves a voice. Because experiences like this are often dismissed as “too much,” when in reality they are simply too human.

This chapter exists to say what so many never hear:

What happened mattered?

What followed makes sense.

And being alive after all of this is not a failure—it is evidence of endurance.

Even when the future feels unimaginable.

Even when the present feels empty.

Even when hope has gone quiet.

The story is not over simply because it hurts to continue.

Chapter 10- survivor 3: Snejna Chowdary- the wounds that never heal

The truth that I have been hiding nearly entire my life, hard to believe at some point. The truth I hate about myself, the truth that made me strong and wise. The truth I had been portraying in my mind like it doesn't happened at all, which is already killing me inside.

Yeah! I am talking about sexual abuse, especially child sexual abuse. Where I got victimized at age 3 n half years as far as I remember continued till 11 years. At the age of 10 I realized that what was happening to me this long is not meant be happened , it's not correct , it's not like what they've said , it's something crime. I said no to them, then they started threatening me to harm the person I like the most. Let's talk about this in detail

What exactly defines CSA (child sexual abuse)?

Any sexual contact between adult and a child defined by touching with the intension, manual stimulation of genitals ,forcing them fondling of genitals and other body parts using child to arouse them ,intend to physically abusing them ,taking unpleasant pictures of and with children and talking sexually to the child include CSA.

Does a child willingly go to them? :

It's so ridiculous to say that a kid willingly went to an abuser. I know kids are the most pure souls, they doesn't trust anyone without a reason. Agree with me? They might have trusted the abuser blindly or abuser may have shown the affection they needed

It's the innocence of kids they played with.

When I have found that it's happening to me

As I said at the age of 10 my friend described me that she had gone through this. And through a television show satyameva jayathe . I was devastated that very moment, I realized that it was something to worry about then I initiated to say no to my abusers.

Yes **abusers** clearly not one, not two ,I only remember 3 faces , they used to grab me in places where they shouldn't, do all the adultery things I can't even mention,
when I say it's paining they even torcher me more . You can ask me why was I silent then? If there are so many people involved. Not all at once but one at particular period of time the reason I kept silent is I don't know what it was, how can a 4 yrs old kid can imagine

something called sex is happening . Among those abusers one said it was a game, one said it like just a common thing between male and female, another said it's like picking nose everyone does it but no one will speak up. They even went far and said you can see couples doing like parents doing it. Before judging me think twice how come a 4yrs or 5yrs or 6yrs kid can knew anything that it was wrong. I kept silent for so long like my mouth got muted for certain topics. And here is a thing I don't lie 99.9% I am afraid to lie instead I keep it mute.

At the age of 13 a boy victim spoke to me, he's so much younger than me I'm in total shook, how come boys be a victim. Found now that 52% of CSA victims are boys. One in 5 kids we can find a CSA victim. Everyone have different story, no one deals with same consequences or no one deals with same mental health problems. The worst part is re-victimization it happened to me in 16 and 17 yrs I got totally devastated felt like its end of my life , I've seen enough.

Impact on a child:

Impact of child sexual abuse is terrifying

Kid can **loose trust** , gain **selective mutism , depression , anxiety , PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) , trauma, temper tantrums** easily got triggered to some incidents and show anger and some psychotic behaviour**, shame , guilt , pain** challenging extremely difficult to live **, suicidal thoughts , night mares flashbacks** actively avoiding situations that might bring back memories of the trauma. Plagued anger directing towards themselves.

IMPACT ON ME:

Felt like I have lost my entire childhood ,my life felt apart, tripped the track , I know I can make many happy memories with the life I used have such a loving and caring family ,I used to be very lucky , but when I found out this all that got blacked out ,I felt like I don't deserve this family , felt unbearable shame ,guilt, always wanted to end my life , there are numerous times I got to edge of ending my life , doesn't made anything better but my tolerance to pain.

No memories left except this, a memory without smile.

I was always a muted kid used to only talk in front of the people I trust most. easily irritated always shows temper tantrums , I have no control on emotions , I used to blame myself for everything that happened , used to have low self-esteem , always used to say I'm fat and I'm ugly with very low confidence.

Re-victimization:

Till age 16 things were used to be fine felt in love everything is in control gained confidence being brave.

But then I got re-victimized twice, how you ask? GROPING which is pretty common ugly deed in our transports, here we go again study felt apart, unusual flash-backs, nightmares, sleepless nights used to cry at night unknowingly in my dreams, person slept next to me always ask this., binge eating, fear to talk to men, hatred towards men, I know not all men are same but victimizing twice made me total insecure, lost complete trust. There are few men I trusted, 3 mostly 3 incredible men, I've ever seen or met

One broke my heart left me without hearing any of this, one knew about this disowned me for other reasons which are consequences of my mental illness, one is still holding my hand through all my fights. I'm lucky and thank-full all of them still love me unconditionally.

Many claim that I'm rude but I always wanted to talk less, avoiding eye contact, what I should say the struggle is real, I got afraid to travel alone. I used to ask my then boyfriend if he had time to be with me while traveling. The last time I travelled in train is 4yrs ago I still have that fear. Sometimes I can't say out loud these to my family, I felt safe around him I trusted him got married to him too. he gave me the mental support I needed a year after I got married ,it took me lot of time to explain it clearly , I praise his patience he haven't come to conclusion within days or months he waited whole year to completely understand my problem. ***Key is just listen to wounded child completely before raining on them with questions.***

When I say that I wanted to end my life the support I got was these words "you have gone through so much came this far only to end your life, I mean just look back how much you have transformed".

I know being with or travelling with your boyfriend is ' izzat ka matter 'in India it is portrayed as a big mistake I know I'm taking big dare doing this. It's better than re-victimizing and loosing life due to mental illness right?

How I got back on track:

At age 20 I got totally lost with all the things happening around me, since past four years have been like whirlwind gone in 2 days where all the people around me got replaced by new ones. I stayed immobilized there's nothing in my mind except ending my own life from unbearable shame and guilt, I have no idea what the answer I gave to all those ridiculous questions. I just wanted to dislocate me from any situation that made worse.

I have no idea about" izzat, prove, pride" only thing I had in my mind is my drowning life I needed emotional support to get up and be normal. Thought I had 3 shoulders to cry on but left alone.

I never wanted to take revenge on abusers , I never wanted to blame them I blamed me for everything happened because of my innocence and being dumb, hated me, there was this

shame guilt ruining my life totally , afraid to be in social gatherings , skipping classes , hard to face anything.

There's a situation where one my abuser's child lying in my lap she was 2 and half yrs old , I prayed god seeing her smiling , 'It should never happen to you what your father did to me' .

I slowly gained confidence back talking to online mental health experts

Cured my binge eating and irregular eating disorders

My depression faded, said good bye to anxiety

PTSD won't leave me but I can manage

There are no sleepless nights, endless fights now, I can say I'm okay without having a mental breakdown.

These all visit me still! But I can manage my emotions now being strong. Now I can emotionally support a victim and give them hope

Message

We know it's a common thing happening for so long then why hushing your children, friends, please stand by their side before they end their lives or got addicted to substances or even worse. Some people told me to hush don't tell this to anyone.

It took to me this long to open up. I'm afraid people will call me 'bechari, iyyo papam ". Ps: I told my family at 18 , it's too late to control all my emotions I was on edge of life , I know it's too late thought I could manage all this gave up and told them

Now I'm doing this to help those muted inner child in victims.

We are not victims we are survivors, fighters. It’s okay to come forward in order to let those victims know u can be more than what you think.

CHAPTER 11 – voices of more survivors

“During my sophomore year of college, an incident occurred that fundamentally altered my sense of safety and trust. I was harmed after being incapacitated, in a setting where I least expected it—within a small, close-knit campus community. The person responsible was someone I knew and trusted, which made the experience especially disorienting and difficult to process.

In the aftermath, I struggled to understand what had happened and questioned my own memory and perception. It took time before I felt able to speak up, driven by a deep fear of being wrong and causing harm by accusing someone without certainty. When I finally did report the incident, the psychological impact intensified, uncovering long-buried memories of earlier violations from my childhood.

The consequences were profound and far-reaching. I entered intensive therapy, began psychiatric treatment, and was forced to step away from activities and goals that had once grounded me. My academic stability, physical health, and emotional safety were all affected. There were moments when the weight of it felt unbearable, and I survived only because someone intervened at a critical time.

Years later, the effects are still present. My body reacts before my mind can reason, particularly in moments of closeness or unexpected touch. I live with diagnosed depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, and while healing continues, it has not been linear or simple.

As part of the formal process that followed, I was asked to put these experiences into words for those reviewing my case. Speaking openly about the impact of the harm—rather than the details of the event itself—became one of the hardest and most exposing things I have ever done.”

“I was gang raped at the age of 19. We're now 14 years later...I'm still having nightmares. Going out in public and having people standing behind me is something I can't handle very well. I've been through very hard-core phases about my identity. Who I am, what I want to do with my life, how I look. Sex life has always been weird, either very active or dead. Limits were pushed to the max with alcohol, drugs, just so I can have a few hours of peace.”

“It happened the first time when I was 8. I’m 32 now and I still think about it every day. I can still hear his voice in my head... After he was done, he told me “if it wasn’t for my wife, I could really fall in love with you.” I was 8. His wife was my Grandma, he was her second husband.

I’ve had too many therapists, countless prescriptions, week-long trips to the mental hospital too. Used substances to cope. Used men to cope. Self-harmed to cope. OD’d in an attempt to end it for good. Still paying off those hospital bills. My entire life has been a struggle, but I’m still here. Still fighting. It’s gotten easier in my 30’s or maybe I’ve just gotten stronger. I’ve been sober for 2 years. Go me.”

“Those of us who have been victimized those who may victimize others or those who may judge and speak from a place of complete and utter ignorance it is important to learn that we do suffer physically the body keeps the score and it is important to learn that we also do heal. It takes a tremendous amount of work. It takes a tremendous amount of courage, but we do heal. I think it’s important to educate young people and encourage survivors to speak about their experiences when they feel safe it is not our burden to carry”

“As a male, I've been raped, I told my school counsellor, she said "Hun boys don't get raped, they do the raping" and suspended me for false information on a teacher, I still feel his hands on me to this day”

“Due to the shame and the surreal feeling of the world being turned upside down after a violation, it can feel easier to put on a mask that everything is fine rather than meltdown in public and risk having to explain what’s going to people who are unlikely to be supportive. This can be compartmentalization or disassociation or any number of other coping mechanisms.”

“Women are often able to function outwardly when required, but the impact emerges in quieter, unguarded moments—while driving alone, stepping away briefly, or encountering someone they trust enough to break down with. There is no single way a sexual assault survivor presents, in part because trauma itself disrupts self-understanding. It is fragmented, not contained.”

Chapter 12- my journey with recovery

My journey with recovery-

One of my therapists told me once that it does get better. It might take time, but it does get better. She described the story of a little girl she had worked with who retained hope because she felt like there was always light at the end of the tunnel. I was at a point where the self-harm was bad, and I was extremely suicidal. I had attempted just the day before. This wasn't what I wanted to hear. "Light at the end of the tunnel"- ugh. But then she also told me how she didn't know how to help me anymore.

I felt like I was letting everyone down. I felt guilty that my family had to go through something I thought I was causing.

So I decided. I was at rock bottom, so the only way was upwards. I got myself into the rehab. I wasn't cured at the end of the month, but I wasn't harming myself anymore—for a few days. This was something that I struggled with on and off during these five years. However, I picked myself up every morning. I harmed myself at night, but I wore my jogging shoes and showed up at 6am even if that meant that people were staring at my arms. I lifted weights and those weights lifted my spirits.

All that till I was assaulted again. We survivors have a tendency of getting re-victimized. I spent days and months on the floor of my bathroom again but I picked myself up again.

I meditated and I meditated, I did my yoga, attended therapy, took my meds, read about whatever I could do in order to get better, like a crazy woman.

Yet I overdosed multiple times. I spent weeks in the psychiatric wards, I danced in rehabs, I made a lot of friends who I could see had struggled and were striving for recovery like me.

I fought through every instinct that just wanted me to die in order to give my exams and show up as much as I could in order to complete my bachelor's in psychology.

Things were getting better till the last event happened and I couldn't quite pull myself together and resorted to substance abuse.

As much as I hate being locked up within the walls of rehabs, I can definitely say that the rehab gave me a second chance to life. Yes I lost everything my old life consisted of but I'm building myself

again, one step at a time. So yes I won't start saying everyone heals or has to, but yeah, I'll keep walking toward the light at the end of my tunnel because I know it exists and I can feel it and see it in survivors around me.

CHAPTER 13

Reflections: Sitting With What Remains

I'd like to hold a moment. I moment for the suffering of those that can be seen and see that will die forever within the soul of the survivors. I wish this silence didn't have to be the silence of secrecy but the silence of support and the silence filled with rage.

When I wrote this, I assumed I would have a chapter or two on healing but unfortunately healing is not linear and something that one can completely accomplish or something that looks the same for everyone. I myself have not reached a place where I believe that I can speak about healing though I definitely feel like my words can echo some of the pain so many of us have been through.

What is remaining is the fact that the aftermath severely lacks the main thing it should contain- safety, understanding, support, listening ears. Recognition of everything that was lost.

Survival doesn't look heroic and most of the times is not treated similarly either. Shame haunts the narratives and visions. Survivors struggle, be it with dissociation, hypervigilance or lack of trust to just name a few. Confusion is often misunderstood as consent and coercion isn't recognized as assault. It looks like coping strategies that make sense in isolation but are judged harshly in hindsight.

I could never go back to who I was in fact I don't even remember who I was before all this transpired and neither do people in my life. I am sure this is not something that I struggle with alone. Something was taken away and it wasn't just our innocence. There are parts of ourselves that were savagely ripped apart that now look for healing that seems so far away if not close to impossible.

There is also a quiet injustice threaded through these stories—the expectation that survivors must carry the burden of understanding what happened to them, often long before the world offers the tools to do so. Many of us did not know what consent meant.

Many of us did not recognize danger because it did not arrive wearing violence. Many of us learned the language of trauma years after our bodies had already been speaking it.

We endure and endure and endure even when all meaning is lost. Most of us never get to therapy either. Our voices barely leave our brains, let alone our lips. We learn boundaries and what good intentions look like one step at a time like children do. It's time to wake up and speak up.

This book does not argue that trauma makes people stronger. That narrative is too simplistic, too dismissive of the cost. What trauma does is force adaptation. And adaptation leaves marks. Some of them painful. Some of them unexpectedly wise. Most of them invisible.

If there is a reflection to be held here, it is this:

What was lost matters. Even if it cannot be fully named. Even if it feels abstract. Even if others cannot see it.

What remains—confusion, fear, resilience, longing, contradiction—also matters. You do not have to turn your pain into purpose, find meaning before you are ready, forgive, recover fully, or tell a coherent story to be legitimate. Sometimes reflection is not about answers but about permission: permission to acknowledge that surviving did not come without cost, permission to stop minimizing, permission to rest inside complexity. This chapter is not a conclusion; it is a pause—a place to sit beside the wreckage without being asked to rebuild it yet. Because some things are not meant to be fixed quickly; they are meant to be witnessed.

Chapter 14- Support and Resources in India

If you or someone you care about has experienced sexual violence, know this: you do not have to navigate the aftermath alone. There are organizations, helplines, and support systems in India designed to help survivors with emotional support, crisis intervention, legal assistance, and longer-term care.

What follows are key resources that offer help ranging from crisis support to counselling and legal guidance. Many of these services are free or low-cost, confidential, and available to survivors of all genders.

24/7 Helplines — Immediate Support Anywhere in India

National Women's Helpline – 181

A toll-free, round-the-clock helpline that connects you with emergency services, psychological support, protection officers, shelter homes, and legal services across the country. thenumberinfo.com

Police Women Helpline – 1091

A national toll-free number operated by police control rooms for urgent situations including sexual assault, harassment, or threat. Wikipedia

Emergency Response Support System – 112

The general emergency number for police, ambulance, and fire services. This can be especially necessary in urgent safety situations. voicehearers.org

Dedicated Sexual Violence & Gender-Based Violence Support

Shakti Shalini (24×7 Survivor Helpline)

A long-standing grassroots organization offering crisis intervention, counselling, rescue assistance, medical and legal referrals, safe shelter options, and ongoing follow-up for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. **shaktishalini.org**

Aks Foundation – 24×7 Crisis Line

Provides confidential psychological support, empathetic listening, and crisis counselling for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of gender-based harm, with the option of legal guidance connections. aksfoundation.org

Nirbhaya Helpline (Sambhali Trust)

Specifically aimed at survivors of violence in Rajasthan, this helpline offers emotional support, legal information, and connections to rehabilitation services. sambhali.org

Sangini Gender Resource Centre

Provides crisis support, counselling, legal form-filing assistance, and access to medical services for survivors of violence in specific regions, helping with documentation and follow

up**. sangini.org.in**

NESCH — Northeast Support Centre & Helpline

Focused on tackling gender-based violence and discrimination faced particularly by women from Northeast India, offering advocacy, counselling, and legal help in Delhi and nearby areas. Northeast Support Centre & Helpline

Counselling and Therapeutic Support

There are several organizations that offer trauma-informed counselling or referrals, including:

 Arpan (Mumbai and online) — works on child sexual abuse prevention and adult survivor support with psycho-social interventions and counselling options.

arpan.org.in

 Parivarthan Counselling, Training and Research Centre (Bangalore) — traumainformed group therapy for survivors. orinam.net

 InnerSight Counselling (Bangalore) — offers individual counselling support.

orinam.net

 Vimochana: Forum for Women's Rights (Bangalore) — emotional and legal support, crisis intervention and shelter services. orinam.net

 Tulir Centre for the Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse (Chennai) — counselling and support tailored to childhood trauma. orinam.net

 ELAAN (Kolkata) — referrals and support for survivors of child sexual abuse.

orinam.net

These services are often connected with networks of psychologists, therapists, and specialised counsellors who understand trauma and can offer ongoing support.

Legal Support and Advocacy

 National Commission for Women (NCW) Helpline & Complaint System — helps register complaints, provides legal referrals and connects survivors with appropriate authorities such as police, hospitals, or protection officers. National Commission for

Women - Many local organisations (e.g., Women of Uttarakhand legal volunteers) offer pro

bono legal assistance to survivors of sexual violence and **POCSO (Protection of**

Children from Sexual Offences) cases.

 One-Stop Centres (OSC) across the country provide medical care, legal aid, counselling, police coordination, and temporary shelter in a single location. These

are often accessible via the Women's Helpline (181). thenumberinfo.com

Legal support can be essential if a survivor chooses to pursue formal reporting, protection orders, compensation claims, or criminal justice processes.

Important Notes When Seeking Support

 Safety First — In a life-threatening situation, calling 112 or police emergency services should always be the first step. voicehearers.org

 Confidentiality — Support organisations and helplines are trained to respect privacy and confidentiality. They will not share personal details without your consent.

 Your Voice Matters — Seeking help does not weaken you. Many survivors hesitate out of fear of judgment or not knowing where to go. These resources exist precisely to meet survivors with dignity and care.

Closing Thought

Support exists, and it is your right to access it. Reaching out for help—whether emotional, legal, medical, or social—is a step toward reclaiming agency and finding stability amidst trauma. None of this erases the pain, but it connects you with people and systems committed

to your safety, well-being, and justice.